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ABSTRACT

Survey results are reported about teaching political parties in American colleges and universities. The purpose of the survey was to collect and disseminate information about techniques used in teaching political parties, books assigned most frequently to students, works viewed as most important in the field, and current level of student interest in American political parties. Information obtained from 368 faculty shows that classroom methodology is fairly traditional and relies heavily upon the lecture or Socratic lecture method. Student discussion panels, formalized class debate, simulations, audiovisual materials, works of fiction, and Socratic lecture were reported to be effective by almost 75 percent of the respondents. Three works by V. O. Key were selected among the ten most important works in the field, while Frank Sorauf's "Party Politics in America" was an overwhelming choice for use in the classroom. Survey data indicate that student enrollment and interest in the political parties area are increasing despite the general political malaise of that age group and the mediocre performance of the economy. (Author/AV)

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"Teaching Political Parties In American Colleges and Universities: A Survey"

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"TEACHING POLITICAL PARTIES IN AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A SURVEY"

In the spring of 1973 the author undertook a survey on teaching political parties in American colleges and universities at the undergraduate level. The intention was to collect and disseminate information about 1) the techniques used in teaching political parties, 2) the books assigned most frequently to students, 3) the works viewed as most important in the field, and 4) the current level of student interest in American political parties.

This survey was conducted with several purposes in mind. One was simply to make the above information available to those teaching political parties, hoping that it will be helpful to know which teaching techniques, approaches, texts, etc. others have found successful (or unsuccessful) in the classroom. A second purpose was to assess the popularity of parties courses as such. It seemed reasonable to hypothesize that in the post-Viet Nam period in the United States political polarization has substantially declined in contrast to the activist sixties, and with it exists the possibility of a diminution in student interest and enrollment in courses dealing with American politics.

Walter Dean Burnham has persuasively argued that the American system is experiencing party decomposition or electoral disaggregation.[1] Among the many signs he has discerned are the tendencies of young people to reject both parties and to identify themselves as independents, so that as much as 42 per cent of the

21-29 age cohort had already done so by 1969, an increase of about 10 per cent over the first half of the decade of the sixties.[2] The drop in voting turnout is another indicator of the new political mood. George Gallup reported that turnout was only 54.5 per cent for the 1972 election, the lowest since 1948. Moreover, while approximately eight out of ten persons were registered to vote, only six out of ten in the 18-30 year old category bothered to register.[3] This phenomenon was also evident in the 1974 off-year elections as only 44.7 per cent of persons aged 18 or over went to the polls, according to a study by the Census Bureau. This was the lowest voting percentage in 32 years, and the final official figures may total as low as 38 per cent, as people tend to over-report their voting participation when questioned. Of the various age categories, the poorest turnout was among persons 18-20-- only 21 per cent.[4]

In addition to substantial decreases in voting participation, there exists the general problem of alienation. In December of 1972, Louis Harris noted that over four in ten Americans, 41 per cent, "still feel largely alienated toward the system under which they live." Among the key groups tending to feel most alienated include young people under 30.[5] Even more disillusioning are the findings of a SRC research team, directed by Arthur Miller, which analyzed political trust from 1958 through 1972. Among their conclusions was that "by 1972 youth, taken as a whole, had become one of the most profoundly estranged groups in America."[6] Presumably subsequent events in 1973 and 1974 with respect to

Watergate, if anything, have exacerbated this situation.

Another problem affecting college students is the state of the economy. "Stagflation" and relatively high unemployment rates might encourage a switch away from liberal arts courses toward more career-oriented or technical disciplines. Conclusive data on this subject could only come from surveys of students themselves. but supposedly faculty who interact with students in an advisory capacity could provide useful information.

II. Methodology

The survey was conducted through a mail questionnaire sent out in May 1973.[7] The population polled was determined through an examination of the catalogs of 575 American colleges and universities. A list was compiled of general courses on political parties being taught throughout the country. The criteria for inclusion were that the course be at the undergraduate level and that it be sufficiently general to cover more than one facet of parties (e.g. party systems, party organization, parties and the electoral process, parties in government etc.). Courses excluded were those that specialized in only one aspect of parties (e.g. electoral behavior or political campaigning). Only a few of the 575 catalogs examined failed to list a general parties course, while a number reported that it was taught by more than one member of the faculty. As a result, a population of 601 emerged of these, 368 completed the questionnaire (61.2

per cent), a very respectable response rate for the method employed.

III. Results

One of the initial questions in the survey asked respondents if they had the opportunity to utilize various teaching techniques and, if so, to assess the effectiveness of each technique used. The data relevant to this question are contained in Table 1. Of the various techniques identified, only one (socratic lecture with 74.7per cent) was used by more than half the respondents. Two others--audio-visual materials and student discussion panels--were used by 39.4 and 38.0per cent respectively. These were followed by works of fiction 27.2, simulations 21.7, and formalized class debate 13.8. A part of this question allowed for open-ended response, and six additional techniques were listed by 5.0per cent or more of those surveyed. The use of guest speakers was cited by 11.4 per cent, participation in campaigns by 10.6, followed by student reports 9.0, traditional lecture 6.2, public opinion or voting surveys 5.4, and data analysis projects 5.4. Overall the data suggest that the field has barely reached "take-off" with respect to experimentation with teaching techniques.

Of the twelve techniques cited, only the six identified by open-ended response were given extremely high ratings on effectiveness as teaching techniques. Thus participation in campaigns was viewed as extremely effective by 84.6 per cent, guest

TABLE I

TEACHING TECHNIQUES UTILIZED BY RESPONDENTS
AND EVALUATION OF THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

Technique	Opportunity to Utilize: Yes %	Yes n	No %	No n	Extremely %	Extremely n	Moderately %	Moderately n	Not Very %	Not Very n
Student Discussion Panels[1]	38.0	140	62.0	228	17.1	24	68.6	96	14.3	20
Formalized Class Debate	13.8	51	86.2	317	19.6	10	54.9	28	25.5	13
Simulations	21.7	80	78.3	288	43.8	35	46.2	37	10.0	8
Audio-Visual Materials	39.4	145	60.6	223	30.3	44	60.6	87	9.7	14
Works of Fiction	27.2	100	72.8	268	40.0	40	58.0	58	2.0	2
Socratic Lecture	74.7	275	25.3	93	36.0	99	57.4	158	6.6	18
Other:										
Guest Speakers	11.4	42			80.0	33	20.0	6		
Participation in Campaigns	10.6	39			84.6	33	15.4	6		
Student Reports	9.0	33			66.7	22	18.2	6	15.1	5
Traditional Lecture	6.2	23			60.9	14	34.8	8	4.3	1
Public Opinion or Voting Survey	5.4	20			50.0	10	50.0	10		
Data Analysis	5.4	20			70.0	14	30.0	6		

n=368

speakers by 80.0per cent, followed by data analysis 70.0, student reports 66.7, traditional lecture 60.9, and public opinion or voter surveys 50.0. Although only a small portion of the sample experimented with these techniques, it is nevertheless striking that not a single respondent concluded that guest speakers, participation in campaigns, public opinion or voter survey, and data analysis were not very effective. It may well be that these are techniques worthy of further exploration by others in the field.

Another question dealt with the intellectual preferences of parties scholars - "What do you consider to be the most important books on American political parties?" -- and it elicited an amazing variety of responses. Asked to list no more than three significant works, the respondents mentioned 121 separate titles. Table 2 lists the titles of those works deemed most important by at least five per cent of those surveyed. After utilizing the five per cent criterion only ten books comprise the final list. V.O. Key's Parties, Politics and Pressure Groups was singled out by 42.1 per cent for its contribution to the field, with Frank Sorauf's Party Politics in America second with 32.9 per cent. After that, there appeared to be no consensus among respondents on a set of "great books," although Eldersveld, Campbell et. al., and Burnham all received more than 10 per cent. One of the striking features of the data was the importance of V.O. Key, who had three works chosen. No other scholar had more

TABLE 2

BOOKS ON POLITICAL PARTIES DEEMED MOST IMPORTANT BY FIVE PER CENT OR MORE OF RESPONDENTS

Author and Title	Per cent of Respondents Mentioning
Key, V.O. Jr. Parties, Politics and Pressure Groups.	42.1
Sorauf, Frank. Party Politics in America.	32.9
Eldersveld, Samuel. Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis.	19.6
Campbell, Angus et al. The American Voter .	18.8
Burnham, Walter. Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics.	11.7
Schattschneider, E.V. Party Government.	9.8
Key, V.O. Jr. Southern Politics.	7.9
Scammon, Richard, and Wattenberg, Ben. The Real Majority.	5.4
Downs, Anthony. Economic Theory of Democracy.	5.2
Key, V.O., Jr. The Responsible Electorate.	5.2
NONE	9.8
	n = 368

than one selected. This is certainly a testimony to the quality of his contribution, as almost ten years after his death he would remain so dominant a figure for people in the parties field.

Respondents were also asked to list the required readings for their courses. It was assumed that there might be differences between what individuals thought were the most important works as opposed to what might be most suitable for undergraduate instruction. Readings required by more than five per cent of respondents are identified in Table 3. In contrast to works deemed most important, more titles (205) are mentioned and more books (19) make the final list. The single most important book for undergraduate required reading is Sorauf with 44.8 per cent with no other work even close in popularity. The next highest is the Crotty, Freeman, Gatlin reader with 15.8 per cent followed by the Abbott and Rogowsky reader with 13.8 and Presidential Elections by Polsby and Wildavsky with 13.0 per cent.[8] Bone, and Scammon and Wattenberg received 12.2 per cent.

One interesting observation is that five of the ten books on the most important works list do not appear on the required reading list. One can only speculate as to why this is the case. This student would venture to guess that Schattschneider's Party Government, Key's Southern Politics, and even the latter's posthumous The Responsible Electorate while outstanding are simply too dated to be assigned to undergraduates. Downs' work is insightful but overly theoretical, while Eldersveld's superb

TABLE 3

REQUIRED READINGS LISTED BY
FIVE PER CENT OR MORE OF RESPONDENTS

Author and Title	Per cent of Respondents Mentioning
Sorauf, Frank. Party Politics in America.	44.8
Crotty, William; Freeman, Donald; and Gatlin, Douglas (eds.). Political Parties and Political Behavior.	15.2
Abbott, David, and Rogowsky, Edward (eds.). Political Parties: Leadership, Organization, Linkage.	13.8
Polsby, Nelson, and Wildavsky, Aaron. Presidential Elections.	13.0
Bone, Hugh. American Politics and the Party System.	12.2
Scammon, Richard, and Wattenberg, Ben. The Real Majority.	12.2
Ladd, Everett. American Political Parties.	9.8
Flanigan, William. Political Behavior of the American Electorate	7.6
Nimmo, Dan. The Political Persuaders.	7.6
Lubell, Samuel. The Hidden Crisis in American Politics.	6.8
Broder, David. The Party's Over.	6.2
Key, V.O. Jr. Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups.	6.2
Burnham, Walter. Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics.	6.0
Wilson, James Q. The Amateur Democrat.	5.7
Campbell, Angus et al. The American Voter.	5.4
Keefe, William. Parties, Politics and Public Policy in America.	5.4
Royko, Mike. Boss: Richard J. Daley of Chicago.	5.4
White, Theodore H. The Making of the President 1968.	5.4
Greenstein, Fred. The American Party System and The American People.	5.2
	n = 368

effort is exhaustive but too micro-political in focus (elites and major party structures in Detroit metropolitan area) for more general undergraduate courses on parties. Another observation is that some instructors find it useful to supplement academic reading with works by prominent journalists. Hence the writings of Lubell, Broder, Royko, and White appear on the required readings list.

A final question was asked on readings. In view of the fact that some students ask about what book can be read for general background the following question was asked: "If you were to recommend a single textbook to an undergraduate for either required or supplemental background reading on the general subject of political parties, what text would that be?" Thirty nine titles were suggested, but only three were mentioned by as many as 5 per cent of all respondents. The overwhelming favorite was Sorauf's Party Politics in America with 51.9 per cent, followed by Key with 12.5, and Bone with 5.7. It should also be noted that almost one-fifth of those selecting Sorauf spontaneously volunteered the information that they would have chosen Key had it been more up to date. This does not detract so much from Sorauf as it indicates the persistent appeal of V.O. Key.

Analysis of the data collected in this survey also shows that although some 39.4 per cent have used audio-visual material, there is little consensus about content. Only five films were mentioned by at least five per cent of those with experience with

this technique. Nevertheless, it is striking that 46.9 per cent of audio-visual users identified "The Making of the President," either the 1960 or 1968 film, and that 18.5 per cent of all survey respondents (almost one out of five) should do so. Somewhat imaginative was the use of film adaptations of works of political fiction, namely Edwin O'Connor's "The Last Hurrah" and Robert Penn Warren's "All the King's Men," with the former being mentioned by 9.6 per cent of audio-visual users and the latter by 5.5 per cent.

The final area of information concerned the status of political parties courses on the American campus. Are enrollments up or down? Is student interest increasing or decreasing? The respondents to these questions reported an enrollment range of 9 to 180, a mean class size of 40.5, and a median class size of 35.0. Compared to previous years, as shown in Table 4, enrollments in parties courses have increased more frequently than they have decreased. A total of 30.7 per cent reported a substantial or slight increase in enrollment, while only 15.5 per cent recorded a substantial or slight decrease. The speculation put forth earlier in this article about the possible impact of the increase in political alienation among college youth and the mediocre performance of the economy on enrollments does not appear applicable, at least not as of the spring of 1973 when this survey was conducted.

The same can be said of student interest. As indicated in Table 4, the impression of 368 respondents is that student interest, if anything, had increased. Those who reported as substantially or moderately higher increase in student interest constituted 32.6 per cent, while those who claimed a substantial or moderate decrease totaled only 10.9 per cent. The others observed it was the same.

TABLE 4

RESPONDENTS' COMPARISON OF CURRENT ENROLLMENT TO PREVIOUS YEARS' CLASS SIZE, AND OF STUDENT INTEREST COMPARED TO PREVIOUS YEARS

Enrollment and Interest Level	Enrollment % of respondents	Student Interest % of Respondents
Substantial[a] Increase	20.7	7.9
Slight[b] Increase	10.0	24.7
Same	40.2	42.9
Slight[b] Decrease	9.5	8.7
Substantial[a] Decrease	6.0	2.2
NA - First Time Taught	13.6	13.6
	100.0	100.0

n=368

[a]Change of 10.0 per cent or more.

[b]Change less than 10.0 per cent

IV. Conclusions

From the above responses to the survey, several generalizations about American political parties as a teaching area may be put forth. First, teachers of political parties seem somewhat traditional in their classroom methodology and rely heavily upon the lecture or socratic lecture method. Of those utilizing student discussion panels, formalized class debate, simulations, audio-visual materials, works of fiction, and socratic lecture, 74.5 per cent or more in each case found them either moderately or extremely effective. The strongest criticism was made of formalized class debate, as 25.5 per cent evaluated it as not very effective. A much smaller number of individuals have used guest speakers, participation in campaigns, student reports, public opinion or voting surveys, and data analysis projects. Of those doing so, a disproportionate number described them as extremely effective, while there were few negative evaluations of these techniques. Perhaps pedagogical methodology might improve if others were to explore these areas.

Second, the data confirm the dominance of the contributions of V.O. Key and Frank Sorauf as important books in the field. Three of Key's works were selected for the ten most important books, while Sorauf's Party Politics in America was not only viewed as a significant contribution but was also the overwhelming choice for use in the classroom.

Finally, informatic collected in this survey suggest that enrollments and interest in the parties area are increasing despite the general political malaise and the mediocre performance of the economy. In view of the massive evidence of party decomposition and widespread political alienation, one can only wish that these data hold a flicker of hope that parties can still be relevant in America and that indeed the party is far from over.

NOTES

1. Walter Dean Burnham, Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), pp. 91-134.

2. Walter Dean Burnham, "The End of American Party Politics" Transaction, 7(December, 1969), p. 19.

3. Washington Post, December 10, 1972, p.A24.

4. Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report,33 (Feb.1 1975) p. 246.

5. Washington Post, December 7, 1972, p. H13

6. Arthur Miller, Thad Brown, and Alden Raine, "Social Conflict and Political Estrangement, 1958-72," Institute for Social Research Newsletter,1 (Spring-Summer-1973), p.5 On the causes of increased distrust in government or cynicism see Arthur Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964-70," The American Political Science Review, 68(Sept., 1974), pp.951-972.

7. On the methodology of the mail questionnaire see Delbert C Miller, Handbook of Research and Social Measurement (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1970),pp 76-77; Julian L. Simon, Basic Research Methods in Social Science: The Art of Empirical Investigation (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 249; and Claire Selltiz, Marie Jahoda, Morton Deutsch, Stuart W. Cook, Research Methods in Social Relations (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), pp. 241-242.

8. It should be noted, however, that the appeal of this particular work is not easily measured in a survey on parties only, as it is one of the most versatile books on American politics in that it can be used in courses on presidential politics as well as more specialized courses on electoral behavior. The same can not be said of general parties texts or readers, hence the overall popularity of a work like Polsby and Wildavsky would be underestimated in a survey such as this.